Subject: LA Times Editorial: How should L.A. handle street vendors?
Date: Wednesday, November 4, 2015 at 9:36:40 AM Pacific Standard Time
From: Jessica Borek
To: Jessica Borek

Good Morning,

I wanted to share with you an updated position from the L.A. Times Editorial Board on street vending. The piece published today and advocates for zoned – not citywide – street vending.

Thanks for all your hard work to move the needle!

Best,
Jessica

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Editorial: How should L.A. handle street vendors? (L.A. Times) November 4, 2015

By The Times Editorial Board

Street vendors are practically everywhere in Los Angeles. They sell sodas, CDs and corn-on-the cob on sidewalks, and flowers and fresh fruit next to freeway offramps. Peddlers in and around parks hawk balloons, ice cream and even toilet paper, and sellers of bacon-wrapped hot dogs cater to crowds when ballgames and clubs let out. Yet, despite their prevalence, the estimated 50,000 local street vendors are all operating illegally. Sidewalk selling may be part of the culture of L.A., but it's prohibited by the city.

The failure to adopt practical, enforceable rules on street vending has created a legal limbo for all involved. The ban on vending is widely ignored and enforcement is spotty, leading to a glut in some neighborhoods, where vendors clutter the public right-of-way with carts and trash. Police officers and city inspectors routinely turn a blind eye to street vending until there is a crackdown, and sellers see their carts and merchandise seized and sometimes destroyed — illegally, according to civil rights groups that filed a lawsuit last week alleging that the city violated sellers' constitutional rights by taking their property without due process.

It's long past time for city leaders to legitimize and regulate this not-very-underground economy. But so far the city is moving at a glacial pace, which is surprising because Los Angeles already has a pretty decent framework on the books. Twenty years ago the City Council adopted the Special Sidewalk Vending District Ordinance, which allows vending in specific commercial districts. The problem with the law was in its details: The process for establishing vending districts was so cumbersome and bureaucratic that it wasn't widely used. The only district ever created was in MacArthur Park, and it was eventually rescinded because the permit fees were too high and there was no enforcement of unpermitted sellers.

However, reforming the ordinance so it's easier to create districts with reasonable rules and permitting fees, and then cracking down on sellers who don't comply, could be an expeditious way to legalize and control vending. That may not satisfy street vending advocates, who want all sellers to be able to hawk their goods anywhere in the city. But it's unrealistic to expect authorities to inspect or enforce vendors dispersed over 500 square miles, and the city may need to limit the number in any given area to keep the sidewalks from being overrun. Nor may such reforms satisfy business groups that want to give shop owners a veto over whether a vending district is created or whether a specific vendor can operate on the sidewalk outside their shops. But the city's job isn't to restrict competition or protect brick-and-mortar businesses. It's to ensure safe, clean and vibrant public spaces, and a well-regulated street vending program can help do that.

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